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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003848

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: KIU SECRETARY GENERAL BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON TRIP TO ANKARA

REF: A. A. BAGHDAD 3788  
[1](#)B. B. BAGHDAD 3779

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Salah al-Din Bahaddin, Secretary General of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), on November 20 briefed the Ambassador on the delegation of Kurdish political parties he led to Ankara to discuss the PKK crisis. Bahaddin said the visit had helped break a Turkish psychological barrier against meeting with Kurds, its reception in Ankara had been very friendly, and the visit had helped ease concerns on both the Kurdish and Turkish streets. His primary points to his Turkish interlocutors were Ankara and the KRG must communicate directly, preferably with U.S. involvement, and the PKK issue must be resolved through non-military means. End summary.

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CONCILIATORY MESSAGE TO ANKARA  
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[1](#)2. (C) KIU Secretary General Bahaddin led a five-member delegation to Ankara to discuss the recent PKK crisis on November 11. Bahaddin said the delegation's message included the KRG does not want to pose a threat to its neighbor, Iraqi Kurds owe Turkey a great debt for having been their only access point to the outside world under Saddam, and some Iraqi Kurdish leaders, recent statements had been unhelpful and not reflective of the broader Kurdish position. (Comment: presumably a subtle indictment of KRG President Barzani's hardline stance early in the crisis.) Bahaddin said the most important near-term step is for greater direct communication between Ankara and the KRG, emphasizing that Washington should facilitate these talks and requesting U.S. guidance on next steps with the GOT.

[1](#)3. (C) Bahaddin said Turkish officials think Kurds feel impervious to outside threats because they perceive the U.S. will protect them. Bahaddin's response was that the KRG is Turkey's friend, and that good relations with the U.S. were no substitute for good relations with a permanent neighbor. In spite of his repeated entreaties for a political, vice military, solution, Bahaddin seemed resigned to the likelihood of a Turkish incursion in the north so long as it remained limited in scope and in media visibility to avoid agitating the Kurdish population.

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KURDS WANT DIRECT BUT DISCREET TALKS  
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[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador agreed on the value of increased

bilateral contact between Ankara and the KRG, but cautioned that talks should be discreet because inflaming a wary Turkish populace benefits neither side. He further urged stronger on-the-ground action against the PKK, such as arresting PKK members and anticipating PKK efforts to circumvent the new restrictions. The KRG need not render PKK detainees to Turkey, but must neutralize them as cross-border threats. Finally, the Ambassador reemphasized the three-step strategy for combating the PKK: short-term KRG constraints on PKK operations, cooperation among the GOT, GOI, KRG, and U.S., and finally negotiations toward a political solution.

15. (C) While acknowledging the current PKK situation is unsustainable, referring to the PKK as a terrorist group, and accepting the Ambassador's call for more KRG action, Bahaddin repeatedly argued that the PKK problem can only be solved definitively if the GOT accommodates its Kurdish population. He argued for greater democratic reform, amendments to the Turkish constitution recognizing multiple languages and ethnicities, and pardoning at least those PKK members who have not committed serious violence.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) Bahaddin presses familiar arguments that Turkey must restrain its military and make concessions to its Kurds, but his comments reflect greater acceptance of Iraqi Kurdish responsibility for the PKK problem than was common before the recent crisis. The delegation's core message included an important acknowledgement that the status quo with regard to the PKK is unacceptable, an acknowledgment that may serve to melt some diplomatic ice between Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish

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officials. However, for these visits to be meaningful, they must be coupled with sustained KRG action on the ground, and a willingness to take more aggressive measures like detaining PKK militants. End comment.  
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